

For Democratization of 1989: Demonstration Space in 1950s Leipzig

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Abstract

The democratization demonstrations of September and October 1989 in Leipzig became the starting point for the democratic movement in East Germany. However, less is known about the urban space that supported these movements – a space that was designed, in the 1950s, to have features of a socialist city. City History Museum Leipzig organized a large-scale exhibition in 2017 to look back on the city plan of Leipzig in the 1950s. In addition, Citizens Committee Leipzig has released the application ‘Leipzig 89,’ making full use of historical materials, and has also created a system through which people can experience the urban space in 1989. However, these studies lack the viewpoint of linking the urban spaces of both the 1950s and 1989 with the keyword ‘demonstration.’ The current study aims to clarify whether Leipzig’s postwar reconstruction as a socialist city in the 1950s formed the urban infrastructure which supported the democratization demonstrations of 1989. As research sources, we used materials from the Leipzig city archive as well as published materials. In terms of the method, we implemented a comparison between the urban space of the 1950s and that of 1989. As a result, the following points were clarified. ‘Demonstration square’ and ‘demonstration route,’ constructed for the demonstration of the socialist system in the 1950s, transformed directly into the urban space which was used, during demonstrations, by the people demanding democratization in 1989. In particular, the vast urban space in the eastern ring, which was planned in the 1950s, was an especially important space where people gathered and marched as part of the democratization demonstrations of 1989. In general, networks of demonstration routes and demonstration squares were quite important for the socialist reconstruction, in the 1950s, of cities such as Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin. In Berlin in 1989, people also gathered at ‘demonstration square,’ which they accessed through ‘demonstration route’ – both built in the 1950s. In other words, the urban space peculiar to socialism in 1950s East Germany already encompassed the great change of democratization.

***Keywords:** Socialism; Socialist City; Demonstration; Democratization; Leipzig*

1. Introduction

1-1. Background of this research

The democratization demonstrations of September and October 1989 in Leipzig were the starting point for the democratic movement in East Germany (German Democratic Republic). However, little is known about how the urban space that supported these movements was designed as a socialist city in the 1950s.

Generally, in modern cities, space is provided for citizens to march during political festivals. For example, at the end of the 18th century in Paris, the government held many festivals which saw citizens partake in marches. Specifically, Paris hosted 20 Revolution celebrations between 1790 and 1798 (1). Citizens who participated in these celebrations relived the Revolution in the urban space.

Such citizen marches in city centers, conducted by the government, were also very important in socialist countries. The starting point was the Soviet urban design in the 1930s. For example, the Moscow reconstruction project of the 1930s designed parade spaces for May Day (May 1st) and Revolution Day (November 7th) (2). Indeed, a 1932 photograph of central Moscow shows a demonstration of workers marching in five columns toward Red Square (3). This state policy was naturally reflected in the urban design of the same period. In the ‘People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry (Narkomtiazhprom)’ competition (1934), which was held next to Red Square, workers were shown gathered in an orderly fashion in Red Square (4). After World War II, socialist states referenced this Soviet city in their urban design (5). Especially in East Germany, demonstration spaces were designed in major cities such as East Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig (6).

In general, demonstrations in cities have two main functions: political celebrations and protests. Using Leipzig as an example, the May Day parades of the East German era fell under the former function, while the Monday demonstrations of October 1989 fell under the latter. However, both ‘demonstrations’ took place in the same urban space, which was designed in the socialist urbanization of the 1950s. This fact is often overlooked.

1-2. Aim, method, research materials, and previous research

In light of the above, this study clarifies the ways in which Leipzig’s postwar reconstruction as a socialist city in the 1950s formed the urban infrastructure supporting the democratization demonstrations of 1989. In terms of methodology, we compare the urban space of the 1950s and that of 1989. In Section 2, we analyze the ‘street network for demonstrations’ in the urban space of the 1950s and 1989. In Section 3, we clarify the concrete design of ‘demonstration square,’ following which, in Section 4, we compare Leipzig’s characteristics with those of other East German cities. This study used research materials from the Leipzig city archive, the online database of the German Federal Archive, and other published materials.

Previous research on urban design in East Germany in the 1950s includes a study by Durth et al. (1999). In particular, the book ‘Ostkreuz’ discusses, in detail, the socialist urbanization of major East German cities in the 1950s (7). Several other recent works have approached this theme. For example, the Museum of City History Leipzig hosted a large-scale exhibition in 2017 that reflected on the city’s plan in the 1950s. Citizens Committee Leipzig also released the application ‘Leipzig 89,’ which made full use of historical materials to create a system through which users can experience the urban space of 1989. However, these works fail to link the urban spaces of the 1950s and 1989 with their influence on demonstrations.

2. ‘Street network for demonstrations’ in the urban space of the 1950s and 1989

2-1. Outline of the urban evolution of Leipzig

Before proceeding to the discussion, we would like to summarize the urban evolution of Leipzig. Leipzig developed as a walled city from the 13th century onward. The city walls were removed in the 19th century, and a ring road and public buildings were built on the vast site. This situation in the 19th century was also common for other European cities (Vienna is a typical example).

Subsequently, after 1949, rebuilding in the wake of the destruction of World War II took place, as did socialist urbanization. Leipzig’s reconstruction program was initiated on February 16, 1949, by the Department of Construction and Transportation within the City Planning Office. In the socialist urbanization of Leipzig, ‘street networks for demonstrations’ and ‘demonstration squares’ were important. As previously noted, this characteristic was the same as that of socialist urbanization in major East German cities.

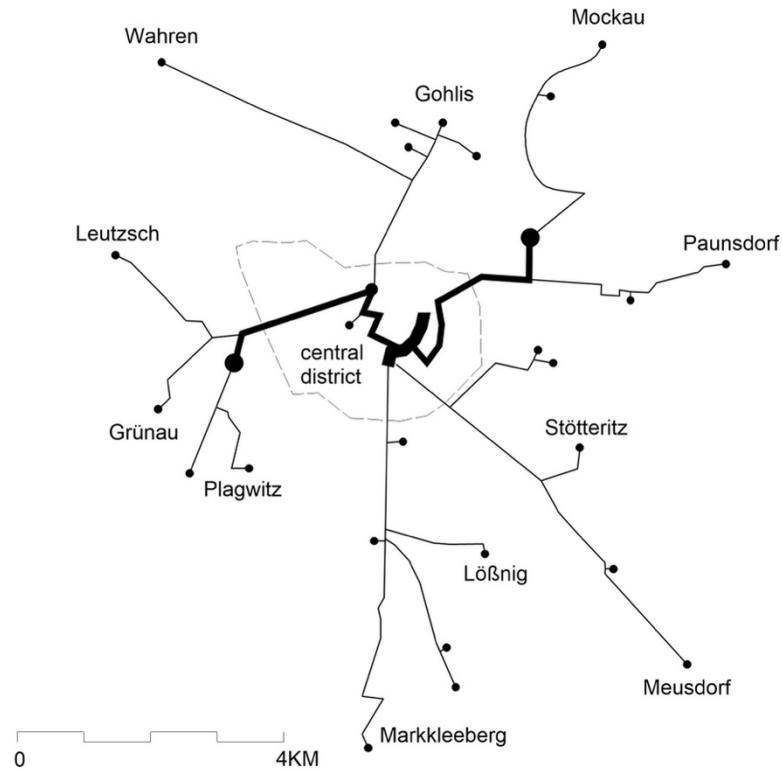


Fig. 1 Street network for demonstrations, Leipzig City Planning Office, July 14, 1952 (8) (Traced by the Author)

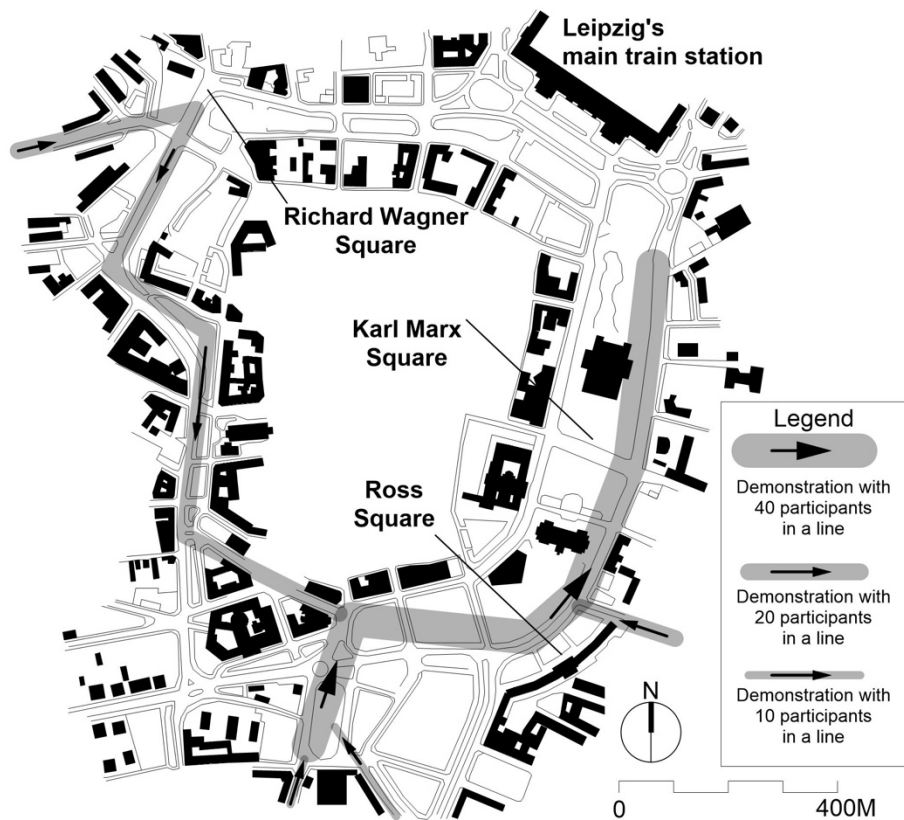


Fig. 2 Street network for demonstrations, Leipzig City Planning Office, July 14, 1952 (Plotted by the Author on a 1959 map of the city center)

2-2. 'Street network for demonstrations' in the urban space of the 1950s and 1989

In this part, we analyze the 'street network for demonstrations' in urban spaces in the 1950s and 1989.

(a) 'Street network for demonstrations' in the 1950s

The graphic in Fig.1 shows the street network for demonstrations drawn by the Leipzig City Planning Office on July 14, 1952. The thickest line indicates a demonstration with 40 participants lined up horizontally. The middle line indicates a demonstration with 20 participants in a row, and the thinnest lines indicate demonstrations with 10 or fewer participants in a row. In other words, the drawing illustrates that the following demonstration route was planned. First, citizens gather from the periphery (Wahren, Mockau, Paunsdorf, Meusdorf, Markkeleeberg, and Lentzsch). The gathered citizens enter the central city mainly from the east and west (two large black circles in Fig. 1), congregating mostly in the southern and eastern parts of the ring road, and finally dispersing next to the central station. Based on this 'street network for demonstrations,' a vast urban space was developed by integrating a ring road and square.

(b) 'Street network for demonstrations' in 1989

Subsequently, we analyzed citizens' movements on the ring road during the 1989 demonstration. The first Monday demonstration along the Leipzig ring road occurred on September 25, 1989 (9). On this day, after a prayer at St. Nicholas Church, the crowd, which had swelled to 5,000 at Karl Marx Square, demonstrated for the first time on Leipzig's ring road. They walked from Karl Marx Square to Richard Wagner Square (Fig. 2). This demonstration was a turning point for the Leipzig Monday demonstrations, in that, by using the ring road for the demonstration, many participants were able to assemble.



Fig. 3 Karl Marx Square, Monday demonstration on October 9, 1989 (10)

Fig. 3 shows the crowd during the Monday demonstration, photographed at Karl Marx Square on October 9, 1989. The said photograph indicates that citizens were gathering at Karl Marx Square to protest. On the evening of this day, the assembled citizens began marching from Karl Marx Square to Leipzig's main train station at approximately 6:30 PM. In the end, 70,000 demonstrators circled, almost entirely, the ring road (11). This route, i.e., Karl Marx Square to Leipzig's main train station, corresponds to the street in the 1952 drawing showing approximately 40 participants in a line (Fig. 1 and 2). In short, the 'street network for demonstrations' in the 1950s, transitioned into an urban space in which citizens demonstrated to demand democratization in 1989.

3. 'Demonstration square'

The results of the analysis of 'street networks for demonstrations' in urban spaces in the 1950s and 1989 revealed that Karl Marx Square played an important role. This square is located in the southeastern part of the ring road. How was the southeastern portion of this civic-concentrated ring road designed in the 1950s? To answer this question, Section 3 focuses on the 'demonstration square,' which located on the southeast portion of the ring road.

This portion is an important part of the demonstration along the said road. However, prior to socialist urbanization, this area was ambiguous in character. The site of the city walls was a vast vacant lot that only housed a theater and one other building in the 19th century (12). In the 1950s, the site was developed as two squares to attract demonstrators from all over the city (Fig. 2).

The first of these is Karl Marx Square (now Augustus Square). This square was the final gathering place for demonstration participants and was considered the main venue for political statements and political festivities.

The second is Ross Square, which was long, arc-shaped, and a continuation of Karl Marx Square. This square served to direct the demonstrators to their final destination, Karl Marx Square. Therefore, Ross Square was defined as a continuous demonstration space next to an apartment building which stretched approximately 350 meters in length (Fig. 4).

Thus, the vast urban spaces of Ross Square and Karl Marx Square, planned in the 1950s in the eastern ring, were particularly important spaces in which people gathered before marching at the democratization demonstrations of 1989.



Fig. 4 Ross Square and an apartment building measuring approximately 350 meters in length; photo of the situation in 2017 (Photo by the Author)

4. Other East German cities



Fig. 5 Alexander Square, November 4, 1989, BArchiv, B 145 Bild-00068930 / Fotograf : Lehnartz, Klaus

Section 4 examines whether the characteristics of socialist cities found in Leipzig are also found in other East German cities. In general, the 'street network for demonstrations' and 'demonstration squares' were quite important in Leipzig's reconstruction as a socialist city in 1950s East Germany. There were also similar plans in other large East German cities, such as East Berlin and Dresden.

In Dresden, 'demonstration squares' and 'street networks for demonstrations' can be found in several reconstruction plans. For example, the plan by Egon Hartmann, compiled with Karl-Heinz Schelling and Rudolf Wohlmann, includes a demonstration square near Old Market Square and a

route for demonstrators to gather from both sides of the Elbe River (13).

Similarly, ‘street networks for demonstrations’ and ‘demonstration squares’ were planned in Berlin. For example, the ‘Plan for Demonstration’ (1950), by Kurt Junghanns, planned (1) a ‘street network for demonstrations’ that also utilized existing major streets such as Unter den Linden, and (2) a ‘demonstration square’ on the site of the Royal Palace, which was destroyed in a 1945 air raid (The Palace of the Republic was built on this site in 1976) (14).

In particular, in East Berlin, the newly-designed Stalinallee (from 1961, Karl-Marx-Allee) was part of the demonstration route. At the Stalinallee in East Berlin, high-rise apartments were arranged parallel to the street (15). Indeed, mass demonstrators were expected to gather, via that route, in the demonstration square. In East Berlin in 1989, people also gathered via the Karl-Marx-Allee, which was built in the 1950s (Fig. 5). The area lined with high-rise apartments on the far left of Figure 5 is Karl-Marx-Allee, while Alexander Square is in front of the high-rise building in the center of the photo. From this photo, we can recognize that the citizens are facing Alexander Square from Karl-Marx-Allee.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals the ways in which Leipzig’s postwar reconstruction as a socialist city in the 1950s formed ‘street networks for demonstrations’ and ‘demonstration squares,’ which eventually supported the democratization demonstrations of 1989. In other words, the urban space that was specific to socialism in 1950s East Germany already held the potential for the shift toward democratization.

Leipzig’s unique characteristics include the following. As revealed in Sections 2 and 3, Leipzig’s Karl Marx Square and Ross Square were shaped in the 1950s for the demonstration of the socialist city. However, the final destination of the demonstration, Karl Marx Square, was a gathering place even before the socialist urbanization of 1949. In fact, on May 1, 1946, a rally was held at Karl Marx Square.

However, this situation varies depending on whether the socialist city is a newly-constructed socialist city or a socialist conversion of an existing city. In fact, Leipzig, Dresden, and East Berlin, where the demonstration network was planned, are all examples of the socialist urbanization of existing cities. In contrast, socialist cities built as new cities in East Germany in the 1950s, such as Stalinstadt (renamed Eisenhüttenstadt in 1961) and Hoyerswerda, show few plans for demonstration networks (16). The reasons for this are not certain, but it is clear that the socialization of existing cities required the planning of a demonstration network.

Thus, it is clear that the socialist urbanization of Leipzig was characterized by (a) planning from the category of socialist urbanization of an existing city, and (b) an accurate reading of the context of assembly squares in existing cities in the placement of demonstration squares.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

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